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Alsip waste site

Firm chosen to continue toxic cleanup

By PHIL ROCKROHR

It will be at least six weeks before toxic chemicals are completely removed from a hazardous waste site in Alsip, an official for the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency said yesterday.

Meanwhile, the EPA agreed to allow the site's owner, Chicago Industrial Waste Haulers Inc., to hire IPEC of East Chicago, Ind., to test soil and uncover any buried tanks at the site, 4206 W. Shirley Lane.

IPEC will perform that portion of the cleanup order after the EPA finishes removing 50,000 more gallons of toxic waste.

The EPA assumed the removal portion of the task last week after Chicago Industrial took another company off the job.

Richard Rupert, on-scene coordinator of the cleanup, said Wednesday that removal is not as urgent now as it was when it started May 19.

"There's still quite a bit of work, but the urgency is not as great now," Rupert said. "We were concerned that with summer coming on, kids getting out of school and temperatures getting higher, that the waste might present a problem."

The EPA is now emptying two 8,000-gallon tanks containing explosive chemicals, Rupert said. The tank contents have been neutralized to reduce the likelihood of an explosion, and will be emptied in coming weeks.

As of yesterday, Rupert said the site still houses the two volatile tanks as well as three 10,000-gallon tanks and two 5,000-gallon tanker trucks that he said are "highly contaminated" with polychlorinated biphenyls (PCBs). Ten other containers, 55-gallon drums, are "mildly contaminated" with PCBs, he said.

PCBs are known to cause reproductive disorders. Some of the tanks contain benzene and methylene chloride, substances also suspected of causing cancer.

The EPA is having trouble finding

a company to haul and dispose of the waste, Rupert said.

ENSCO, of El Dorado, Ark., has agreed to accept one load tomorrow, another next week and a third in two more weeks.

In the meantime, the EPA will consider other possibilities.

"We're looking at different alternatives, but basically there's only one thing you can do — burn it, incinerate it," Rupert said. "We're trying to be innovative. We want it out as soon as possible."

"The earliest I'm hoping is that we can do it in six weeks, unless we can come up with some alternative technique that's suitable."

A Chicago company agreed to accept some of the waste, but is not able to do so until July.

Another possibility is taking the waste by railroad cars to ENSCO.

"ENSCO might take it under that situation, but they're still considering it," Rupert said.

It will cost \$100,000 to dispose of the waste and \$30,000 to transport it. Chicago Industrial is paying those costs, and will be forced to reimburse the EPA for \$20,000 to \$40,000 in personnel hours, Rupert said.

According to the order, the EPA may fine the company up to \$25,000 per day for violating the order and up to three times the amount it costs the EPA to clean up the site.

However, Rupert said such fines are usually reserved for "punitive type" purposes.

Because Chicago Industrial has been cooperative thus far, the company will probably not be fined, he said.

Fred Prillaman, an attorney for Chicago Industrial, could not be reached for comment yesterday.